

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3769

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2338

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINR, MILI, SY

SUBJ: POSITION OF RIF'AT AL-ASAD

REF: A. USDAO DAMASCUS 186 (IR 6 891 0078 75);

B. DAMASCUS 1800

1. POSITION AND PROSPECTS OF PRESIDENT ASAD'S BROTHER, LTC RIF'AT AL-ASAD, CONTINUE TO BE LEADING SUBJECT OF SPECULATION IN DAMASCUS. ON ONE HAND, TWO SYRIAN BUSINESSMEN, GENERALLY KNOWLEDGEABLE ON SYRIAN POLITICS, RECENTLY SEPARATELY CONFIRMED TO EMBOFF THAT RIF'AT AL-ASAD HAD BEEN REPLACED AS COMMANDER REPUBLICAN GUARD. ONE BUSINESSMAN ADDED THAT BAATH PARTY STATUTES REQUIRE A MILITARY OFFICER TO GIVE UP HIS MILITARY POSITION IF HE ACQUIRES POSITION OF RESPONSIBILITY ON BAATH REGIONAL COMMAND.

2. EMBASSY NOTES THAT IF SUCH STATUTES EXIST, THEY ARE NOT ALWAYS ENFORCED. MAJOR GENERAL ABD AL-GHANI IBRAHIM, FOR EXAMPLE, IS DIRECTOR OF SYRIAN MILITARY'S POLITICAL BUREAU AND AT SAME TIME A REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER.

3. OTHER SOURCES INDICATE THAT AL-ASAD IS PROBABLY STILL IN COMMAND OF THE REPUBLICAN GUARD. SOURCE WITH RELATIVE IN THIS FORCE TOLD EMBOFF THAT RIF'AT REGULARLY ATTENDS
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REBPULICAN GUARD MORNING STAFF MEETINGS. SOURCE ALSO STATED THAT

RIF'AT HAD ATTENDED MANEUVERS OF REPUBLICAN GUARD CONDUCTED OUTSIDE DAMASCUS THREE WEEKS AGO. IN ADDITION, HE STATED THAT HIS RELATIVE ON FORCE WAS UNAWARE OF ANY INTENTIONS OF RIF'AT AL-ASAD TO LEAVE REPUBLICAN GUARD WHICH HE DEVELOPED AND WHICH CONSTITUTES HIS FIRMEST SUPPORT.

4. IN ADDITION, JUNE 10 ISSUE OF AL-FURSAN MAGAZINE, BIWEEKLY PERIODICAL OF LEAGUE OF HIGHER STUDIES OF WHICH RIF'AT AL-ASAD IS NOW PRESIDENT, CARRIES EDITORIAL "BY STAFF LT. COL. RIF'AT ALI AL-ASAD, COMMANDER OF THE DEFENSE SQUADRONS." SECOND ARTICLE SHOWS RIF'AT IN MILITARY UNIFORM OVER TEXT OF CONGRATULATORY LETTER FROM HIS TROOPS TRANSLATED AS FOLLOWS: "OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS OF THE DEFENSE SQUADRONS PRESENT WARM CONGRATULATIONS TO COMMANDER OF THE KNIGHTS, LT. COL. RIF'AT AL-ASAD, ON OCCASION HIS ELECTION AS MEMBER OF BAATH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND. THEY PLEDGE THEMSELVES BEFORE HIM TO FOLLOW STEPS OF THE COMMANDER FO THE SOCIALIST UNITY MARCH, LT. GEN. HAFEZ AL-ASAD, SYGEN OF THE BAATH PARTY, UNTIL LIBERATION AND VICTORY."

5. COMMENT: ON BALANCE, IT APPEARS THAT AS FAR AS TROOPS AND OFFICERS OF REPUBLICAN GUARD ARE CONCERNED, RIF'AT AL-ASAD IS STILL THEIR COMMANDER.
PELLETREAU

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